

TEAM BUILDER

Whether he's dealing
with **telecommunications,**
professional sports, or
higher education, Board of
Trustees Chair **John H. Chapple**
proves that passion, innovation,
and collaboration matter

BY DAVID MARC

JOHN H. CHAPPLE '75, THE 21ST CHAIR OF THE Syracuse University Board of Trustees, likes to see the data, but doesn't always go by the numbers. "I remember the first time I asked a Wall Street analyst about mobile phones, back in 1988," says Chapple, president of Hawkeye Investments, a private equity firm specializing in telecommunications. "He showed me that wireless usage would reach about 5 percent of the American population over the next 12 years! A lot of financial people saw limited growth potential in wireless in those days. They thought it was a redundant expense because consumers already had telephones in their homes and offices." Wireless subscription soon leapfrogged the early forecasts, but most prognosticators believed it would plateau at perhaps 40 percent. Chapple begged to differ. In 1998, he organized Nextel Partners, a wireless telecommunication company whose success hinged on penetration exceeding 70 percent. Serving as Nextel's president and CEO, Chapple shook up the industry, taking the company public in just two years and overseeing its sale to Sprint Communications in 2006 for a reported \$9.5 billion.

When asked what gave him the vision to see beyond the towering bar graphs, Chapple jokingly admits he would love to pull out some "quantitative scientific data" showing he had out-researched the researchers. But he insists he learned what he most needed to know as a student of human behavior. "Even in the early days, when cell phones were called 'car phones' and they were about the size of bricks, I could see that mobile communication was having a positive impact on people's lives," he says. "Here was a device that allowed you to work or run a business more efficiently and, therefore, more profitably. At the same time, it kept you in closer touch with your family and helped you watch out for your kids. It was more than just a convenience. I knew people would make sacrifices for something that could do all that."



This was not the first time Chapple had staked his fortune on a personal judgment. Twenty-five years earlier, while working for the City of Syracuse, he had watched the awarding of a new cable TV franchise to update the system for dozens of new satellite channels and interactive services. "Just about everybody had broadcast television, but I saw people making sacrifices to pay their cable bills—cutting down on dry-cleaning, getting their hair done less often, things of that nature," he says. "To me, that meant cable TV was something people really wanted." He was so convinced of the industry's bright future, he left his job to work for a cable company, embarking on his career in telecommunications.

A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Born in Ashland, a small Wisconsin town on the shores of Lake Superior, Chapple grew up mostly in Potsdam, New York, the oldest of five children in a family tied to the academic world. Both of his parents were university administrators; his father eventually served as dean of admissions at Clarkson University. "I was a borderline student in high school and wasn't sure what I wanted to do," he says. "But

I had a good interview at Syracuse and was offered an academic scholarship. They saw something in me, so I made the most of it. I can't think how dramatically different my life would have been had I not been given that opportunity. I've carried a sense of responsibility to give back for more than 30 years."

Chapple arrived on campus at a tumultuous juncture in American history that was having a profound effect on higher education. With no end in sight to the war in Vietnam, student deferments from the military draft were cancelled while he was a first-year student. Drawing a low number in the recently instituted Selective Service draft lottery, he received notice in the fall of his sophomore year to report for a pre-induction physical in February. "I was so sure I was heading for Vietnam, I didn't even bother to register for spring semester," Chapple says. "Then, just 10 days after I passed my physical, Nixon announced suspension of the draft."

Having seen friends lose their lives in the war and others go into exile in Canada, Chapple returned to Syracuse with a growing need to understand how seemingly distant events were shaping his life and determining the fate of his generation. "I took courses on American government and history

at the Maxwell School with Michael Sawyer, the great constitutional law professor, and I served as a teaching assistant with Bill Coplin," he says. "I studied American political history with Bob McClure. As a 20-year-old, I didn't agree with everything Bob said, but I always admired his passion. I learned the value of passion." Chapple counts fellow student Robin Toner '76 as a powerful influence as well. Toner, a front-page national political reporter for *The New York Times* for nearly 25 years, died of cancer last year. In honor of his longtime friend, Chapple funded a symposium on campus in October (see "Honoring an Acclaimed Journalist," page 12) and provided a lead gift of \$100,000 to help the University establish the Robin Toner Endowment, which will enable an annual lecture or symposium, an award for outstanding political reporting, and other initiatives.

These pivotal intellectual experiences and relationships

helped Chapple articulate core beliefs that continue to motivate him. He began expressing appreciation to the University long before reaching the executive suite, and with each personal success came increased support. A member of the Maxwell School Advisory Board since 2000, Chapple has also served on the SU Athletics Advisory Board for the past two years. In 2006, he presented the University with one of the most deeply valued gifts in higher education: an endowed faculty position. Robert McClure, his mentor, was appointed the first Chapple Family Professor of Citizenship and Democracy at the Maxwell School. "John's central concern for the professorship is the teaching of citizenship to undergraduate students," McClure says. "As Chapple Family Professor, I teach Maxwell citizenship courses to undergraduates and it's my responsibility to ensure high-quality instruction in these courses by attracting my best

JOHN H. CHAPPLE '75 reflects on his role as chair of the Board of Trustees in an interview with *Syracuse University Magazine* associate editor David Marc.

DM: Having become board chair just in time to face a worldwide financial crisis and the steepest economic recession in 80 years, how is the job going?

JC: I'm very encouraged by the response of alumni and the entire University community. You learn a lot about an institution and its people in tough times. Last December, we were suddenly confronted with the fact that some students weren't going to be able to come back for spring semester because of parents losing jobs, significant investment losses, and things of that nature. We rallied quickly by putting together the Keep 'Em 'Cuse campaign (see "SU Community Assists Students in Financial Crisis," page 9). I pledged \$150,000 as an initial challenge, and people responded. We were north of a million dollars in a matter of weeks. It was the best kind of success because we could measure it in human terms. We were able to construct a financial package that allowed every one of those students on the bubble to come back to school. What's more, we found a majority of donors were first-timers. That's all extremely gratifying. I've also learned a few things that show we have plenty of work to do. For example, recent data reveal that, on average, alums of some of our peer schools give significantly more than Syracuse alums in the course of a lifetime. That shows me there is plenty of opportunity for us to improve. When people ask how we're going to finish raising a billion dollars in a down economy, I circle right back to my experience with Keep 'Em 'Cuse. I think of all those students, faculty, staff members, and alums working together and getting results. We even had deans working the phone banks. Yes, the current economic environment has made it a bit tougher sledding, but the reality is that everything is cyclical. We're going to have that billion dollars.

DM: Are you planning any changes in how the Board of Trustees is run?

JC: I want the board to become a more participatory body by having trustees build stronger relationships with others in the University. For a while now, the board has had three student representatives, one graduate student and two undergraduates, who attend meetings and report on issues of concern so we can act on them. But, in a meeting with the Chancellor's evaluation committee, I was struck by the fact that there was no faculty representative. I spoke to the Chancellor, who was immediately in favor of it, and the trustees voted unanimously last May to add a faculty rep. [Harvey Teres, an English professor and director of Judaic studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, was appointed to a two-year term this fall.] That's one step toward our broader goal of more cross-pollination of ideas. Another is greater diversity on the board. We have a trustee from Puerto Rico and we're adding a trustee from Dubai. In the last couple of years we've broadened our national profile with people from Los Angeles, Seattle, and Houston. A cornerstone of Syracuse's success is an ability to cultivate diversified talent in our students, faculty, and administrators. Same goes for the Board of Trustees.

DM: What do you hope will be the chief legacy of your tenure as board chair?

JC: We've got a winning academic program that teaches collaborative thinking and emphasizes community engagement. Our faculty is doing research that's solving people's problems and changing the world. Our alumni are breaking through to new heights in business, politics, the arts, science—you name it. I want to help create a culture of giving at Syracuse that fully supports these accomplishments and opens the door to the next level.

BIOFILE

JOHN H. CHAPPLE '75

Chair, Syracuse University Board of Trustees
President, Hawkeye Investments LLC,
Kirkland, Washington

Board of Directors Memberships

Yahoo! Inc., a global Internet company

Cbeyond Communications Inc.,
a broadband and voice Internet provider

Telesphere, a voice over Internet protocol
(VOIP) company

Seamobile, a privately held company
providing integrated wireless services at sea

Leap International, a wireless company

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY Service

Board of Trustees, member since 2005;
chair since 2008

Maxwell School Advisory Board,
member since 2000

Athletics Advisory Board,
member since 2007

Other Service Positions

Visiting Committee, Daniel J. Evans School of
Public Affairs, University of Washington
Apostle Islands (Wisconsin) Historic
Preservation Conservancy

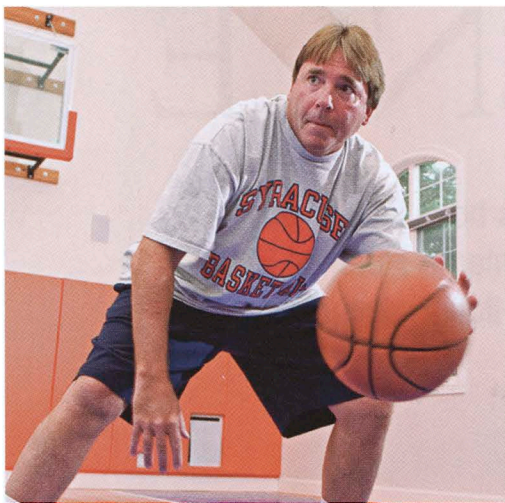
Education

College of Arts and Sciences, B.A. degree,
political science, 1975

Harvard Business School,
Advanced Management Program, 1992

Orange Legacies

Paul Chapple '89, brother;
John Chapple '04, son



colleagues to teach them as well. John feels his early experiences in studying citizenship touched him deeply, and wants to guarantee future generations the same opportunity." McClure believes that Chapple has done the school a special service by directing his gift in a way that reiterates the mission envisioned for it by founder George H. Maxwell. "If you look at the east entrance, it doesn't say 'school of social sciences' or 'school of government' or any of the other subjects Maxwell has become so famous for," McClure says. "It says 'citizenship' because that is the root subject from which the others grow in a democracy. John wants us to keep sight of that." As for Chapple, he is characteristically succinct. "There's a lot of joy in this kind of giving," he says.

LEADERSHIP REQUIRING TEAMWORK

In 1988, after a decade as a successful executive in the cable television industry, Chapple left a senior management position at American Cable-systems to join McCaw Cellular Communications, a family-founded company that started out in cable TV, but had changed its focus to the wireless telephone business. It was a good move for Chapple and McCaw. The Redmond, Washington, company became an industry leader in the early '90s, pioneering new technology that facilitated the first national cellular network. But spectacular success attracted an irresistible suitor. In 1994, McCaw became AT&T Wireless. "I was asked to stay, but there was no way," Chapple says. "I had been to their headquarters too many times as part of the team making the deal with them. There were just too many people and too much bureaucracy for it to be a cultural fit for me."

Having earned a reputation as a productive, creative executive in a highly competitive growth industry, Chapple entertained job offers, two of which he found compelling: a senior position with American Tower, a wireless infrastructure company controlling thousands of cell towers across the country; and a chance to become president and CEO of Orca Bay Sports and Entertainment, then owner of the National Hockey League's Vancouver Canucks, the National Basketball Association's Vancouver Grizzlies, and their new home, General Motors Place, a downtown Vancouver arena and retail development under construction. "I remember being in the Dallas airport for a meeting and calling my son John to ask him what I should do," Chapple says. "To him it was a no-brainer. He said, 'What are you, nuts? Take the sports job!'" Chapple did and, at first, felt as if he really had been handed the ultimate set of toys. He took particular pleasure in seeing GM Place "rise from dirt" for its 1995 opening and watching it fill up with 21,000 people out for an evening of fun. "But as I moved into the third year, I found myself dealing more and more with contract negotiations, and that's a lot of hard work—and not the fun kind," he says. "What bothered me more was how difficult it was to introduce any new ideas in pro sports. Most things require approval by the other owners, and a good idea—something that makes total sense for everyone—can get blown out of the water because someone's ego is too sensitive to allow someone else to have his way." The unproductive effects of petty egotism and lack of teamwork were much on Chapple's mind as he stepped down from Orca to plan a new venture in wireless communication, Nextel Partners. "We gave it that name because every single person who worked at Nextel was a partner who owned stock in the company," he says. "Internally, we didn't use titles; although once we became a public company, we had to have them to show investors. But hierarchy for hierarchy's sake was out at Nextel. Redirecting that energy to collaboration is a huge game changer. We proved that."